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Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7915th meeting

Wednesday, 5 April 2017, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mrs. Haley	(United States of America)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 27 March 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/260)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 27 March 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/260)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Kim Won-soo, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Kim Won-soo.

Mr. Kim Won-soo: I would like to thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to brief the Council on the Syrian chemical file, undertaken in furtherance of Security Council resolutions 2118 (2013), 2235 (2015) and 2319 (2016). But I will do so with a heavy heart.

Since yesterday morning, I have been in close contact with the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). I also met with the chargé d'affaires of the Syrian Arab Republic in New York.

I will first brief the Security Council on the most recent reported use of chemical weapons, in Khan Shaykhun, in Idlib, Syria. At this point, information is still coming in. Currently, details about the attack are not fully known, but, according to the most recent media reports, a chemical attack may have caused the deaths of at least 70 civilians, with perhaps more than 200 injured. Both the Secretary-General and the OPCW Director General issued statements expressing grave concern about these reports and reiterating their condemnation of any chemical-weapons use.

I have been in close contact with the Director-General since the first reports came in yesterday. He informed me that the OPCW Fact Finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic is actively engaged in gathering and analysing information from all available sources and will be prepared to deploy a team at the earliest opportunity.

If confirmed, this would constitute the single largest chemical-weapons attack in the Syrian Arab Republic since the attack on eastern Ghouta, in August 2013. Reports have stated that the attack was carried out through an airstrike on a residential area. However, the means of delivery of the alleged attack cannot be definitively confirmed at this stage.

Reports have also indicated that the presentation of symptoms after the attack included respiratory problems, vomiting, fainting and foaming at the mouth, as well as miosis, or pupillary constriction. This was visible in videos on social media said to have been taken at the scene of the attack.

During my discussions yesterday with the chargé d'affaires of the Syrian Arab Republic, he stated that his Government denied having used chemical weapons in this attack or any other attack.

I would like now to turn to my monthly briefing on work regarding the Syrian chemical file.

First, on destruction, for the last three years following Syria's initial declaration, all declared chemical materials and equipment have been removed or destroyed. Four hangars and seven tunnels have been disabled. One hangar and two above-ground stationary facilities remain subject to verification of their disablement.

This work is still pending, mainly due to the prevailing security situation around these facilities. For this work to be complete, the OPCW, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Nations Office for Project Services extended the tripartite agreement until the end of this year.

Secondly, on the declaration assessment, for the past three years the OPCW has worked with the Syrian Arab Republic to assess and verify the declaration. A number of outstanding issues related to Syria's declaration still remain open. The high-level consultations between the OPCW and the Government of Syria to address these unresolved issues will resume in The Hague in early May.

The first OPCW inspection at the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) took place

starting last February. During this inspection, OPCW inspectors took samples, which are now being analysed by OPCW-designated laboratories.

Thirdly, on investigations into alleged chemical attacks, the OPCW Fact Finding Mission is looking at a number of incidents that have taken place over the past several months. It is in the process of finalizing its reporting, and this should be done in some weeks' time. Should any Fact Finding Mission report conclude that an incident involved or likely involved the use of toxic chemicals as weapons, it will provide the basis for the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) to begin its work to attribute responsibility for their use.

The investigative capacity of the JIM is now operational. It is based in The Hague owing to the obvious need for it to work closely with the OPCW teams. It will be fully ready to begin its work as soon as the Mission reaches its conclusions. The political and other support structures of the JIM in New York are likewise operational, with a liaison presence in Damascus soon to be established.

As has been done in the past, I expect that all members of the Security Council, and all Member States in a position to do so, will provide information and access to both the Mission and the JIM in order to facilitate the collection of evidence for the establishment of facts.

The Secretary-General is deeply disturbed by the continuing reports of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Khan Shaykhun and elsewhere in Syria. The Secretary-General recalls that the Security Council has repeatedly determined that the use of chemical weapons anywhere constitutes a threat to international peace and security as well as a serious violation of international law.

With this determination, the international community has made tremendous efforts, symbolized by three consecutive joint missions of the OPCW and the United Nations over the past four years, to stop the impunity for chemical-weapons use from growing any further.

Despite these efforts, however, it is profoundly disturbing to witness the tragic consequences of the continued use of chemical weapons on innocent civilians. We are grateful to the Security Council for addressing this issue with unity, including through the creation and renewal of the JIM.

On our part, we would like to reassure the members of the Security Council that the OPCW and United Nations secretariats will provide every possible support to the work of both the Fact-finding Mission and the JIM so that these missions will discharge their mandates in an independent, impartial and professional manner. We look forward to the deliberations of and continuing guidance from the Security Council.

The President: I thank Mr. Kim Won-soo for his briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like to begin by thanking the United States presidency for agreeing to our request to convene an emergency meeting of the Security Council and to congratulate you, Madam, on your accession to the presidency. I also thank Mr. Kim Won-soo for his briefing and his efforts over the past two years as High Representative for Disarmament Affairs.

After six years of conflict in Syria, marked by the most appalling violence against the civilian population, and in particular by the prolonged and repeated use of chemical weapons — in particular chlorine gas — by the Syrian regime against its own people, we awoke yesterday to learn yet again that an ignoble attack had just been committed at Khan Shaykhun, south of Idlib. This can only remind us of the terrible day of 21 August 2013, following the chemical attacks by the regime in Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus, whose unbearable images haunt our memories.

This chemical horror, which is hardly new and should therefore surprise no one, marks the latest phase of the Syrian tragedy's descent into the abyss. The facts are extremely shocking and extremely serious. Once again, lethal toxic substances have been used and released from the air. The sordid outcome is now over 100 people killed by asphyxiation, including more than 10 children, and there will undoubtedly be more victims. The symptoms reported by those on site and visible in the images of the attack are not characteristic of chlorine but suggest the use of a much more aggressive substance. This is the most deadly incident of violence since the large-scale attacks by the Syrian regime in

August 2013 in Ghouta, where more than 1,000 people have lost their lives.

France, through its highest authorities, has firmly condemned this carnage, which is further proof of the barbarity that has stricken the Syrian population for several years. While some claim that what occurred was a strike against a chemical weapons depot belonging to the "terrorists", I would like to recall three simple facts. First, there was no conflagration, while such a strike would have caused a fire whose consequences would have been far more serious for civilians. Secondly, the incident occurred in an area where the Syrian army and air force are currently active; moreover, new strikes were observed in the Idlib area yesterday. Lastly, the responsibility of the Syrian air force has already been irrefutably called into question for the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon at least three times by the conclusions of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, mandated by the Council.

Yesterday's atrocities, which constitute war crimes, come in addition to new suspicions of chlorine use late last month and the multiple cases reported over several months, in particular in Aleppo in December 2016. They tragically illustrate the self-destructive folly of the Bashar Al-Assad's regime that even its supporters — as we have seen today — are unable to prevent, and whose silence is tantamount to endorsing these barbaric acts. This new outbreak of violence confirms that until there is a credible political transition, no one can guarantee the peace and security of the Syrian people or the return to stability in the Middle East. We must therefore set in motion without delay the political transition that the Council sought and approved by unanimously adopting resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). That has been France's position from the very outset.

All light must be shed as soon as possible on the details of this shameful massacre. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) immediately addressed these allegations. My country fully supports the OPCW's Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic and the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism to enable them to investigate as soon as possible. All allegations of chemical weapons use must be duly investigated and monitored.

But that, of course, is not enough. Those responsible for these attacks answer for their deeds and be brought to justice. It is high time for the international community to put an end to the crimes of the Syrian regime. No political alliance can justify turning a blind eye to mass atrocities, procrastinating, equivocating or diverting the world's attention to other tragedies — in short, denying the evidence.

Russia, as the guarantor of the ceasefire established on 29 December 2016 and as a permanent member of the Security Council, has a special responsibility that it must now assume, alongside all members of the Council. That is why France, the United Kingdom and the United States have taken the initiative to introduce a draft resolution that we hope will unite the international community around a clear, firm position rejecting the unacceptable.

Faced with evidence of the repeated, methodical and barbaric use of weapons of mass destruction — in this case chemical weapons — against civilian populations, inaction and paralysis cannot be options. Our collective credibility as the guardians of international peace and security and as individual States committed to fighting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is at stake. This is a question of respect for international humanitarian law and our ability to restore a collective norm that has been openly flouted — the ban on the use of chemical weapons against civilian populations, which the international community sought to prohibit for all time almost a century ago.

We have a collective responsibility to protect the chemical non-proliferation regime that had been the subject of a responsible consensus in the Council until now, but which is disintegrating today before our very eyes. The risk is that all the non-proliferation regimes we have patiently built together, day after day, over the recent decades will fall apart with it. The re-emergence of these weapons in Syria, including in the hands of Da'esh, while the international system fails to react sends a signal of impunity that is extremely dangerous and not acceptable. All of Syria's chemical capacities must be dismantled in order to protect the Syrian people and our collective security.

Out of this fog of uncertainty emerge moments of reality when we can no longer prevaricate or shirk our responsibilities. The very bases of our values, the law and our security are at stake. As to our values, who would fail to condemn those who have murdered

women and children in cold blood and in such abject and horrendous circumstances? Is this not the very negation of civilization in its entirety? As to the law, the Security Council unanimously agreed to condemn those responsible for these deaths by chemical weapon. What are we waiting for to apply the law that we ourselves helped to formulate? As to our security, if we close our eyes to the use of chemical weapons against civilians, what legitimacy will we have in future to condemn nuclear terrorism or a potential bacteriological apocalypse? Who will be ready to assume that kind of responsibility in the face of history?

Just a few weeks ago, I called on all of us here to take stock of and assume their responsibilities (see S/PV.7893). Let us make no mistake: the lack of consensus in the Security Council on 28 February to sanction the proven use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime was, unfortunately, a clear signalling of impunity. The despicable massacre in Khan Shaykhun is a terrible reminder of reality and of our responsibility. The time has therefore come for us to act collectively, with a sense of conscience and all the necessary firmness, in the face of the use of weapons of mass destruction. I would like to express the hope that we can at last join together to reiterate collectively our rejection of the use of chemical weapons. The world is watching us — and in particular watching those who would protect an indefensible regime, and who would be complicit for this most heinous crime.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): On 28 February (see S/PV.7893), I asked a simple question of the Security Council, namely, would we take action against those who used chemical weapons in Syria? We had a chance that day to adopt a draft resolution (S/2017/172) that would have done exactly that — a draft resolution that would have taken action against the Al-Assad regime and against Da'esh, proven to have used chemical weapons by the mechanism that we set up. We could have sent a clear message that day, a clear signal that there would be consequences for using these horrific weapons and for violating international law, a clear signal that there was Security Council unity, global unity, against any use of these weapons. But after Russia and China vetoed the draft resolution, it seems that the only message sent to Al-Assad was one of encouragement.

Yesterday we saw the consequences of those vetoes. Those consequences are painted on the stricken faces of the children of Khan Shaykhun, killed potentially by a regime that will stop at nothing to hold on to power. History will judge all of us for how we respond to these unforgettable, unforgivable images of the innocent, who had already suffered so much even before yesterday's attack. How long are we going to sit here and pretend that actions in this Chamber have no consequences, that vetoes have no bearing on the lives of innocent men, women and children?

Russia has said that the opposition is responsible, that a regime airstrike struck an opposition munitions depot. But we have seen nothing to suggest that any non-State actors in Syria have the sort of chemical weapons that would be consistent with the symptoms that we saw yesterday. Russia will say simply that we do not have enough information about the attack. And yet we have every indication that this was a sustained attack using aircraft over a number of hours. We see all the signs of an attack using a nerve agent capable of killing over 100 people and harming hundreds more. If that is not enough to demand action, what is? There is only one air force that has used such weapons in Syria. There is only one party to this conflict that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) says has "gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies" in its Chemical Weapons Convention declaration. Only one party still refuses inspectors access to its facilities. This does not look like the work of terrorists. This does not look like the work of the opposition. This bears all the hallmarks of the Al-Assad regime, and the use of chemical weapons is a war crime.

Make no mistake: this regime seems intent on making a mockery of the Russian-backed ceasefire. Russia has blocked Council action, claiming that we might undermine the Astana process. Yet the only thing undermining the Astana process is Al-Assad, the very man they seek to protect. Russia deployed the full weight of its armed forces to help him. They reduced Aleppo to ruins and displaced hundreds of thousands of men, women and children — all in the name of fighting terrorism. And what does Russia get as repayment? Al-Assad humiliates Russia in the eyes of the world by intensifying his attacks and by reducing the Astana ceasefire to ruble. Al-Assad humiliates Russia by showing just how empty Syria's promise was to remove all its chemical weapons.

If Russia is to restore its credibility, it will need to join us in condemning this attack and in urging the OPCW to investigate it as soon as possible. They will join us in calling for the fullest support and cooperation

for the investigation team. They will help, not hinder, our efforts to strengthen accountability through the vital work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism. There can be no further delay in staffing the leadership of the Mechanism. It must have the right technical and analytical capacity to take on the task ahead. If Russia fails to do so and falls back on its old ways, defending the indefensible, we will not be deterred. The United Kingdom, with our allies, will continue to seek justice for the victims of chemical-weapon attacks, in Syria and elsewhere. We will continue to pursue other avenues for action. The European Union sanctions announced last month against Syrian military persons show that we can still take steps to hold individuals to account, that we can still show that the use of chemical weapons brings consequences.

But until Russia changes its ways, the Security Council will remain blocked. That is the sad reality that the world has gotten used to. They view us as a table of diplomats doing nothing, our hands tied behind our backs, beholden to Russian intransigence. But the world should be under no illusion. What Russia does in this Chamber does not cause inaction; defending the indefensible causes suffering. Each and every abuse of its veto has consequences. For the people of Khan Shaykhun, those consequences have been unspeakable.

Let me conclude by asking Russia: what is its plan to stop these horrific, senseless attacks? We had a plan and we had the support. They rejected it to protect Al-Assad. It is now time to stop blocking and start helping, by joining Security Council consensus. Our draft resolution condemns this attack and calls for consequences. All 15 Security Council members should be able to confirm this and every use of chemical weapons. We expect members' unanimous support.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Security Council is meeting today in the face of a horrific event. The Plurinational State of Bolivia expresses its strong condemnation of the use of chemical weapons and the use of chemical agents as weapons — justifiable and criminal acts regardless of the reason behind them, whenever and by whomever committed. Those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be duly investigated, tried and punished to the fullest extent. The use of chemical weapons is a violation of obligations established under international law as well as a threat to international peace and security. Bolivia demands an independent, impartial, comprehensive and conclusive investigation that is completely depoliticized. In that regard, we reiterate our support for the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism in ensuring that, in line with their mandates, they can carry out the tasks I mentioned.

We also express our vigorous condemnation of any type of attack against innocent civilians or civilian infrastructure in this or, indeed, in any other conflict. We reiterate the obligation incumbent upon all parties to ensure the safety and security of persons caught in the middle of the conflict. We reiterate that the use of chemical weapons is a serious crime against international security. We also express our heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims and the Syrian people while encouraging them to continue their efforts to finding a lasting peace.

With regard to the note submitted on 23 February by the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons on the verification process of chemical weapons in Syria, we appreciate that its secretariat "verified the destruction of 24 of the 27 chemical weapons production facilities declared by the Syrian Arab Republic" that could have produced chemical weapons. We hope that the security situation in Syria will improve and allow for the verification of the remaining facilities. According to the same report,

"all of the chemicals declared by the Syrian Arab Republic that were removed from its territory in 2014 have now been destroyed".

We therefore underscore the willingness and readiness expressed by the Syrian Government to comply with its international obligations. We also welcome the fact that the Joint Investigative Mechanism continues to strengthen its operational capacity in reopening its office for research at OPCW headquarters and that it carries out its work in the most methodical, technical and trustworthy way possible.

Bolivia calls for the unity of the Security Council so that the Council Chamber is not used as a sounding board for war propaganda, so that that the international community can look upon it with confidence and so that it not be used as a pawn in planning for war. Only investigations will determine the responsible parties, and we believe that the most responsible way to proceed is not to prematurely determine who is responsible for those acts but to ensure an independent, impartial, comprehensive and conclusive investigation.

Finally, I would like to underscore the words of the Secretary-General, who has reminded us that Syria has undergone seven years of war marked by the increasing suffering of the Syrian people. We believe that it is incumbent on the Council to recall at present and forever the causes of that terrible war. We would probably not be sitting here and lamenting the seven years of war and suffering of the Syrian people had it not been for the invasion of Iraq more than 10 years ago in the context of interventionist policies in the Middle East. I believe that it is a universal responsibility for those who committed such crimes to also assume their historical responsibility. We believe that it is imperative to recognize that interference, interventionism and that policy of regime change undermine all civilizations established by the various peoples of the world. We naturally regret and are saddened and moved by the loss of life, but we once again stridently call for the unity of the Council and for it to be used not as a sounding board for war propaganda but as a place in which we debate and agree on the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China is profoundly shocked by the alleged use of chemicals as weapons in Syria that resulted in enormous civilian casualties several days ago. We strongly condemn any attacks against civilians. China firmly opposes the use of chemical weapons by any country, organization or person under any circumstances, and that has been its unwavering and consistent position that no one should ever distort. In Syria, there have been many instances of the use of chemicals as weapons.

China supports the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and related United Nations entities in carrying out comprehensive, objective and fair investigations into all — I repeat all — uses of chemicals as weapons. The findings of such invesitigations must be based on substantial evidence and stand the test of time and facts. It is essential to hold accountable all relevant perpetrators and responsible parties in cases involving chemical weapons.

The Syrian conflict has entered its seventh year and, to date, resulted in enormous civilian casualties. China empathetically shares in the suffering of the Syrian people, and we call on the various Syrian parties to quickly end the conflict. A political settlement is the only way out the Syrian impasse. China hopes that all the parties will create the conditions for a political settlement rather than create difficulties. It is China's hope that the international community will capitalize on the rare opportunities offered by a political settlement, persist in the general direction of a political settlement, step up its support for the United Nations as the main channel for mediation, support the work of Special Envoy of the Secretary-General De Mistura, urge the various Syrian parties to consolidate a ceasefire and build up mutual trust, adhere to the principle of a Syrian-led and owned settlement as advanced in the Geneva talks, and push for positive results to be achieved within the framework of a political settlement.

Counter-terrorism currently is the primary area of concern in connection with the Syrian issue. The international community should strengthen its cooperation, unify its working methods and resolutely fight against all the terrorist organizations listed by the Council.

Lastly, I should like to point out once again that it is totally unacceptable for the British representative to publicly distort the solemn position of another country in the Council Chamber. His logic is untenable. We hope that, on the issue of chemical weapons, on which the international community is in consensus, he will stop using the Security Council in an abusive manner for his own political purposes, as that is not in the interest of the Syrian people, and that, in the future, the British representative will refrain from such practices.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank the United States presidency for convening this meeting. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Kim Won-soo for his briefing.

Japan is seriously concerned by continued reports of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria, including most recently in Idlib, which reportedly led to the tragedy affecting more than 400 victims. The use of chemical weapons is not permissible and must be strongly condemned under any circumstances, and those who are responsible for their use must be identified and held accountable. I believe that there is unity inside the Security Council on those fundamental points.

In addressing the new allegations in Syria, we must first determine whether chemical weapons were actually used, and, secondly, if confirmed, we must identify those who are responsible. Taking measures to hold the perpetrators accountable is the final and indispensable step in fulfilling the Council's responsibility. Impunity is unacceptable.

In that context, Japan welcomes the fact that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic has already begun gathering information. We urge the Syrian Government and all parties in Syria to cooperate fully with the Fact-finding Mission and the Mission itself to conclude its investigations, not only in connection with the Idlib incident, but also with other recent allegations as soon as possible, so that the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism can conduct its own investigation in order to identify those responsible.

With that in mind, it is increasingly important to further improve the coordination between the two mechanisms and the Council so that we can react more swiftly to any alleged use of chemical weapons. If we are to dissuade potential actors from using them, it is crucial to show that any such use will be brought to light and that those responsible will be held accountable.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): I would first like to thank High Representative Kim Won-soo for his briefing and to express our appreciation to you, Madam President, for your leadership in navigating this year's difficult and crucial issues related to the international security architecture.

Italy is shocked by the chemical-weapon attack that is once again alleged to have been perpetrated in Syria, and by the additional bombardments of hospitals where the wounded were being treated. What happened in Khan Shaykhun is sickening and despicable, and we condemn it in the strongest possible terms, just as we would condemn the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and in any circumstances. Such attacks not only confirm the Syrian regime's utter contempt for its own people but are also a tragic reminder that international law, including Security Council resolutions and the international non-proliferation architecture, continue to be blatantly violated.

We welcome the commitment of the Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to gathering information from all available resources, and we look forward to its findings. In that regard, we supported the draft resolution (S/2017/170) submitted by the United Kingdom, the United States and France and aimed at condemning the attack and ensuring that the investigations are as effective as possible.

As long as nobody is being held accountable for these war crimes and crimes against humanity, there will still be an incentive to continue carrying them out. That is why fighting impunity, identifying the perpetrators and holding them accountable must be a shared priority for the Council, one that unifies rather than divides us. Italy encouraged action by the Security Council for ensuring the accountability of those responsible and the imposition of sanctions on them, as a follow-up to the activities of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigation Mechanism. After that pathway in the Council was blocked, on 20 March Italy backed new restrictive measures imposed by the European Union on four high-ranking Syrian military officials for their role in the use of chemical weapons against their civilian population.

Italy also supports the mechanism set up by the General Assembly to gather evidence and assist future prosecutions of crimes committed in Syria. Moreover, as a subscriber to the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group's code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes, and to the initiative of France and Mexico on veto restraints in cases of mass atrocities, we once again reiterate our call to the Council to act. In our view, those crimes should also warrant the attention of the International Criminal Court. Indiscriminate violence against civilians continues to be seen as a tool for winning this war militarily. That approach is not only morally unacceptable, it is wrong-headed and delusional. A solution will never be found through military means, however appealing that may seem to one of the parties at the moment. The only way out of the crisis is through an inclusive political settlement, arrived at in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), that addresses the plight and aspirations of the Syrian people and drains the quagmire of violence and instability where terrorism flourishes and endangers the whole world.

Furthermore, we should emphasize that the attacks were cynically perpetrated just at the end of the most recent round of talks in Geneva, which, under the leadership of United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, whom we support, attempted to inject new life into the political process. The attacks cast serious new doubt on the commitment to a political solution.

The attacks also cast new doubt on the regime's willingness to abide by the terms of the ceasefire. They do not represent an isolated case but are just one of

the repeated violations of the ceasefire that have been carried out, particularly by the regime, over the past few months. Such behaviour destroys the possibility of any confidence between the parties on the ground, just as the deliberate restrictions on the provision of aid that continue to worsen an already tragic humanitarian situation have been doing. A strengthened cessation of hostilities is our best hope to move on from the military phase and ensure safe and complete humanitarian access. In that regard, and in conclusion, all of us — particularly the guarantors of the Astana process — have a special responsibility to live up to our commitments and ensure that the ceasefire is fully implemented and can thus provide a basis for a concrete political process.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to start by expressing Egypt's firm condemnation of any use of chemical weapons or weapons of mass destruction by any party. We especially condemn the confirmed use of chemical weapons in more than one incident in Syria against our brothers the Syrian people, as reported by the Joint Investigative Mechanism of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations, which is responsible for investigating such incidents.

We do not understand how such crimes can continue to be ignored, with no thorough or just accountability. Egypt has therefore always affirmed the importance of holding any party responsible for such inhumane acts accountable, whatever their justification, including by the Security Council and based on agreed rules and principles and on effective evidence-gathering and investigation. In that regard, I deplore the division within the Council and our failure to come up with a resolution that can ensure accountability untainted by the politicization and polarization that have afflicted the international arena.

With regard to the reports of yesterday's sad incidents in Khan Shaykhun in Idlib, I urge all parties to cooperate closely with the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic in order to enable it to determine the facts on the ground. I call on the Mission to reach its conclusions as quickly as possible so as to enable the Joint Investigative Mechanism to conduct its activities in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions. We will therefore support any serious action in the Council to address this and other incidents and hold those responsible accountable. In that regard, we stress the importance of focusing on and addressing the issue of the production, possession and use by any non-State actors of weapons of mass destruction, which constitutes a threat to the region and the world, particularly in view of the fact that the Security Council lacks the legal instruments that could deter and address such threats.

The killing and targeting of civilians have become a painful reality that is part of the Syrian people's daily life. We are now used to hearing death and displacement in Syria spoken of in terms of figures and numbers, to be used and exploited purely for political purposes. Regrettably, after the Council had succeeded in agreeing on the parameters of a political process for addressing the threat of chemical weapons and ensuring humanitarian access in Syria, divisions and infighting within the Council — even on issues unrelated to Syria — appear to be threatening the prospects for a settlement once again. I would like to once again emphasize the importance of ensuring that the international mechanisms can investigate all war crimes committed in Syria in order to ensure accountability through a serious and honest approach.

I urge Council members to resume serious political dialogue with a view to addressing the Syrian crisis, while avoiding the atmosphere of competition, polarization and mutual blaming in the media that has characterized recent years. It is worth noting that millions of innocent civilians are paying the price, and that the people of the region will bear the brunt of this crisis for years to come.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Yesterday, as I looked at the images coming out of Khan Shaykhun, I felt physically and mentally ill. The words used by Joseph Conrad in his novel *Heart of Darkness*, and subsequently placed by Francis Ford Coppola in the mouth of Marlon Brando in his film *Apocalypse Now* — "the horror, the horror" — came to mind. That is what one perceives and feels in the face of these horrors. These are not acts of war. These are barbaric acts, and Uruguay condemns in the strongest terms yesterday's attack, which resulted in a huge loss of life, including of women and children. We saw children dying as they tried to breathe. We saw women — already dead — clutching their children. And this is not the first time because, unfortunately, we have seen these images coming out of Syria time and again.

The use of sarin gas or other nerve agent indicates that the culprits intended to cause as much damage to the residents of that area as possible. They lost their lives in horrible circumstances, choking. Once more, we are witnessing a display of a complete lack of humanity on the part of combatants in Syria. The hospital in which the wounded were being treated was bombed just a few minutes after the initial attack. That is becoming a recurring model in Syria, in Yemen, and other countries. First, civilians are attacked, and then minutes later, all those trying to aid the victims are attacked.

As Secretary-General Guterres so aptly put it yesterday, no one is winning this war. Everyone is losing it, especially the millions of Syrians who continue to see their lives destroyed on a daily basis. These horrific crimes should not and cannot remain unpunished, whoever is responsible for them. For the time being, we do not have the information that would allow us to categorically confirm who is responsible for this action. However, we need to recall that it is the primary responsibility of the Syrian Government to protect its population, and it is also the Syrian Government that has the main responsibility to provide the maximum and unhindered access to Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons experts who arrived in Syria yesterday to investigate the circumstances of the attack and to collect evidence. We hope that, unlike previous cases, the investigation will take place expeditiously and in such a way as to allow us to understand who was behind these deeds and to demand that they be held accountable for their actions.

This is not an isolated event; it occurred amid the intensified bombing and fighting of past weeks — in spite of the ceasefire that is supposed to be in effect — and the recent terrorist attacks that have also caused many deaths. All of this threatens the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Staffan de Mistura to bring the parties together to reach an intra-Syrian political solution that would make it possible to put an end to this conflict.

Unfortunately, the Security Council remains part of the problem and not part of the solution. There is little time, and with every day that passes we see an increasing number of people wounded or killed and the entire country being destroyed. The money collected during donors' pledging conference will be useless if the destruction of Syria and other countries continues. It might certainly be possible to rebuild the physical infrastructure, but it will never be possible to give life back to the thousands of innocent civilians. The total cessation of bombings and hostilities has re-emerged as a necessity.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): The position of Kazakhstan on the use of chemical weapons in Syria is consistent and well known. We strongly oppose any use of chemical weapons, as well as any other kind of weapon of mass destruction by any State organization or individual, regardless of the circumstances.

We were shocked and deeply saddened by this terrible chemical attack in Idlib, Syria. Kazakhstan strongly condemns such actions, which demonstrate the ruthless intent to destabilize the situation in the country. We wish to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families of the victims and to wish a speedy recovery to those injured.

Will our collective efforts to prevent further escalation of the situation in Syria, including the continued peace negotiations in Geneva, risk being undermined by such provocative actions? Any criminal behaviour that is implemented in such an inhuman way, and that pursues intimidation, must be classified as a terrorist action, which we must combat with full determination.

Kazakhstan urges the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations to immediately conduct full investigations without any delay, and to identify the perpetrators of this heinous crime. As we see, it is mainly innocent people who continue to suffer. The deliberate use by criminals to sow fear and anxiety is a characteristic method of terrorist organizations. In the light of this, we request a full and prompt investigation, which must go beyond routine procedural formalities. The Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic must directly collect evidence and make every effort to identify the perpetrators of this flagrant crime in order to bring them to justice.

Given the circumstances and proceeding from the need for a complete and unbiased disclosure of these crimes, we need comprehensive and open cooperation between the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism and the Fact-finding Mission. As a proponent of impartial and full disclosure of all chemicals crimes in Syria, Kazakhstan urges the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as other parties, to cooperate fully with the international

inspectors of the United Nations and the OPCW. Any delay in terms of disclosure or holding the perpetrators accountable demonstrates tacit agreement to continue such crimes in the future.

I thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Kim Won-soo, for his briefing. Yesterday's flagrant crimes in the Idlib region of Syria, as well as the ongoing potential threat of the use of chemical weapons in this country demand serious and energetic efforts. Unfortunately, as we see from the report before us (S/2017/260, annex), the critical issues that require progress to move us forward remain unchanged.

First, there is the issue of the three remaining facilities, the destruction of which still seems impossible due to the lack of the necessary security conditions. It is necessary to take urgent action to finally resolve this problem. In turn, it will help us to ensure that all official sources that raise suspicions about the storage of hazardous chemicals would no longer exist. Therefore, more active interaction is needed with the Government of Syria. In that regard we look forward to the resumption of high-level consultations with Damascus in May to address all unresolved issues related to the declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic. We expect the results of these consultations in the next report, which will outline the forthcoming steps that need to be taken.

Secondly we would like to see more dynamic and speedy measures taken by the fact-finding mission, which would help the Joint Investigative Mechanism commence investigations on new crimes.

Thirdly, the active interaction and collaboration of the Joint Investigative Mechanism with the three Security Council Committees in accordance with paragraph 4 of resolution 2319 (2016) will result in a more effective response for preventing and combating such threats. Bearing in mind that the mandate of the Mechanism is already coming to an end in November 2017, we must urgently take all measures to strengthen the work, which is necessary if it is to complete in a timely manner all pending investigations of previous crimes as well as new ones committed in Syria.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank you, Madam President, for calling this meeting with the urgency that the situation requires. I hope that the Security Council will shoulder its responsibility and act in a firm and united way in response to what we have seen.

We join other members of the Council in condemning the monstrous and cowardly attacks reported to have been carried out with chemical weapons yesterday on the people of Idlib. The pictures emerging are truly shocking. We have seen the lifeless bodies of those struck down as they went about their daily lives and the heartbreaking images of children desperately gasping for air. Our thoughts are with the families and friends of those who died and who have been injured, but there is also a sense of outrage. The attacks on the hospitals that followed are equally appalling.

The use of chemical weapons is illegal and constitutes a threat to international peace and security and can amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity. What happened in Idlib must now be investigated without delay. If the allegations are proven to be correct, then this will be a gruesome addition to the already-confirmed cases of the use of chemical weapons and other serious international crimes committed by the Syrian regime. Those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria must be held accountable, as the Council agreed in resolution 2209 (2015).

In the light of what we have seen over the last 24 hours, it is important that the Council now show a united front. We must do all that is necessary to facilitate the important work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM). Sweden therefore fully supports the draft resolution put forward this morning by the United Kingdom, France and the United States. There is an urgent need for OPCW fact-finding mission to establish the facts and report its findings as soon as possible, including to identify those responsible. In order to do so successfully, they must receive the full cooperation of the Syrian authorities.

This attack further underlines the importance of the Council's continued focus on chemical-weapons use in Syria. As we have stated before, the Syrian authorities must cooperate fully with the OPCW to allow it to verify the accuracy and completeness of the chemical-weapons declarations. This is critical for addressing the gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain.

We appreciate the work of the JIM and we welcome that it will soon be fully operational. We look forward to reports containing more information on the four previously identified cases involving Da'esh and the Syrian regime as well as the new cases, including this

most recent attack, to be presented by the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic.

In conclusion, we will continue our efforts in the Council and elsewhere to ensure that those responsible for the heinous crimes in Syria are held accountable. Sweden has contributed to the JIM as well as to the impartial and independent mechanism mandated by the General Assembly which is now being set up. The work of the Commission of Inquiry for Syria must also continue. We have also actively supported the European Union's recent introduction of targeted sanctions on individuals implicated in the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

The attack in Idlib underlines the importance of the Security Council's work to end the use of chemical weapons. We cannot shy away from our responsibilities. We must now redouble our efforts.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I wish to thank Mr. Kim Won-soo for his briefing. Let me take this opportunity to express my appreciation to him for his commitment and dedicated service as Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs since June 2015. I would also like to congratulate his successor, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu.

The report of the use of chemical weapons in Idlib yesterday is indeed very shocking. What we have seen in videos and pictures is simply heartbreaking. Earlier, the representative of Uruguay expressed so eloquently what we also felt at this grievous sight. We express our profound sympathy for the victims of the attack. As we have stated before, we are concerned about continued reports of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, including the eight incidents that have been recorded since the beginning of the year. We strongly condemn any use of chemical weapons by any State or non-State actor.

The use of chemicals as weapons is unacceptable and unjustifiable under any circumstances. We agree with what the Secretary-General stated in his letter dated 27 March 2017:

> "The continuing use of toxic chemicals as weapons, as well as the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, imperils the long-established norm against such weapons. There can be no lawful and impunity must be stopped by identifying and holding those responsible to account." (*S/2017/304, p. 1*)

We hope the reported attack in Idlib will be investigated by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic as effectively as possible. In this regard, we welcome the statement of the OPCW that indicated that the fact-finding mission is in the process of gathering and analysing information from all available sources. More importantly, after a proper investigation process, the perpetrators of the attack should be identified by the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) based on reliable evidence in order to ensure accountability. It is very critical that whatever action is taken by the Security Council is and appears to be based on credible evidence about which no well-meaning and objectively disposed person could have doubts.

The continued reports of chemical attacks in Syria give us additional justification for fully supporting the work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism. That is why it is so critical that the JIM resume its work as expeditiously as possible. Without its full operationalization, the Council would be unable to ensure accountability, which we believe is imperative for holding perpetrators to account and deterring the further use of chemical weapons. It is therefore essential to provide all necessary support for the JIM so that it could resume and conduct this investigation in a professional, independent and impartial manner.

It is not only a matter of ensuring justice to the victims of chemical-weapons attacks in Syria, but it is also about preserving the non-proliferation architecture that is a critical pillar for maintaining global peace and security. The proliferation of chemical weapons and their use including by terrorists is a source of grave concern and poses a serious threat to peace and stability in the region and beyond. Such a threat could be sustainably addressed if political and diplomatic solutions are given primacy. Only an inclusive political process could ultimately address the Syrian crisis and stop the horrible attacks, including what we are currently, from continuing to cause unspeakable suffering to the people of Syria. Without underestimating the challenges that lie ahead, we note the limited progress made in the 10th round of intra-Syrian talks, which concluded a few days ago. We look forward to the briefing by Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura next week.

In conclusion, we are inclined to vote favourably on the draft resolution proposed by the United Kingdom, the United States and France. It is our conviction that

the more united the Council is with respect to the actions that it takes on the matter, the easier the international community will find it to control the menace of the use of chemical weapons. That is why we look forward to finding common ground to ensure that there is unity within the Council so that investigations are conducted as speedily and as effectively as possible.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): First of all, I would like to thank the United Kingdom and France for requesting today's meeting, and the presidency for promptly convening it.

At the outset, let me recall the statement by the Foreign Ministry of Ukraine issued today on the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria, which reiterates, inter alia, that the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances is a blatant violation of international law and must be strongly condemned, and those responsible for such acts must be held accountable.

There appears to be no end to the incessant flow of reports from Syria regarding the use of toxic chemicals as weapons. A real Pandora's box was opened in 2012 and, to date, we continue to witness the grave consequences of the Syrian Government's actions and decisions, or rather the lack of them, from five years ago. The genie is out of the bottle but the international community is still undecided about what to do about it, despite the consensus that the use of chemical weapons is unjustifiable and cannot be tolerated.

The international community, including the Security Council, has been very prolific and eloquent in expressing concern and condemning the use of toxic chemicals as weapons, but that is as far as it goes. There is an astounding lack of concrete actions, and therefore the gap between talking the talk and walking the walk is only growing. Vivid images of the victims who were exposed to the poisonous gas in Idlib yesterday serve as a bold and clear wake-up call to the whole international community. They are a stark reminder to all of us as to the [illegible] that there is going to be and for any failure to act. These innocent civilians in Idlib paid the ultimate price because the Council could not get its act together on the Syrian chemical weapons issue. These children whose parents we are yesterday fight for breath and battle suffocation because of fatal decisions made in distant capitals by people preoccupied by their own power agendas.

Under the circumstances, repeating the usual mantras of "Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons investigation", "Joint Investigative Mechanism involvement", "need for the host Government's full cooperation" and so on sounds hollow and, frankly, is an affront to the people of Syria. Moreover, the Council's failure to act on the issue will create the false perception that perpetrators of that crime can hide behind the wall of lies and falsification — the hybrid wall constructed by the Al-Assad regime and secured by the Russian veto. That wall must be knocked down. My only question today is this, Where is the limit to our collective tolerance, which appears to have no boundaries? And as a follow up: How many more Idlibs will it take to finally move on this issue?

Proceeding from the Council's common position that the use of chemical weapons is a flagrant violation of international law, we believe it should act resolutely and without any delay. In that regard, Ukraine supports the draft resolution presented by the United States, the United Kingdom and France, as a balanced and focused document that introduces specific actions. We hope that this important document will be adopted by the Council today. That is the least we can do to ensure that the Idlib attack is not ignored.

Mr. Sock (Senegal) (spoke in French): My delegation would like commend France and the United Kingdom on their initiative to request today's meeting, and you, Madam President, on your decision to promptly convene the meeting to enable the Security Council to address the subject of the alleged use of poisonous substances — chemical agents and chemical weapons — yesterday, 4 April — my country's national holiday — in Khan Shaykhun, Idlib governorate. Scores were killed and hundreds suffocated, including children. The entire civilian population was affected. We express sincere condolences to the families of the victims and to our Syrian brothers and sisters. We wish the injured a speedy recovery.

I would like to congratulate [illegible] Mr. Kim Won-soo, on his clear and objective presentation and to commend him for taking the precaution, to the extent possible, of consulting with the representatives of the Syrian Government here in New York. The [illegible] issued by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which is already tasked with collecting and analysing information from all available sources in order to

determine those responsible, is also concerned about proceeding with caution.

As you, Madam, recalled here on 28 February (see S/PV.7891), nothing can justify the atrocity of the use of chemical substances as weapons anywhere or at any time, including in Syria, a conflict zone, and in particular on civilian populations. That is why, staying true to its principled stance, and in its capacity as a State party to the Convention on Chemical Weapons, Senegal reiterates, through me, its firm condemnation of the use of weapons of mass destruction of all kinds — including chemical weapons — as occurred yesterday in Khan Shaykhun.

Yesterday's barbaric act in an interminable war in Syria and ongoing allegations of the use of chemical weapons in that country further illustrate the relevance of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. In that regard, we continue to encourage the steering committee in its efforts, pursuant to resolution 2235 (2015) and 2319 (2016), to conduct objective and impartial investigations to identify those responsible for the unacceptable use of chemical substances as weapons. Ongoing consultations between the OPCW secretariat and the competent Syrian authorities are also of vital importance to ensure that the Fact-finding Mission can effectively discharge its mission.

How can we not be concerned yet again about non-State actors — terrorist groups such as Islamic State and the former Al-Nusra Front — possessing such loathsome weapons? That is why we are calling for improved cooperation among all States Members of the United Nations, in particular those of the region, to put an end to the ongoing illegal arms to extremist terrorists in Syria and beyond. Once again, my delegation calls on all the members of the Security Council to return to the spirit of consensus and cooperation that prevailed prior to the adoption of resolutions 2118 (2013) and 2319 (2016). It should be recalled that those resolutions entitled the Council to make tangible progress on the destruction of the chemical weapons production facilities declared by the Syrian Government. It is now up to the members of the Council to work together to provide follow up to the substantive findings of the investigations undertaken by the Joint Investigative Mechanism. Everyone is well aware of the complexity of the task.

In conclusion, we continue to believe that only a legitimate political solution based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015) will help us achieve a lasting solution to this conflict, which is having devastating humanitarian consequences, while we must also shed light on all the facts concerning the allegations of the use of prohibited weapons in Syria. My delegation therefore once again expresses its desire for the success of the fifth round of the Geneva talks, which began on 23 March, and we hope that, together with the Astana process, the talks will also strengthen the substantive findings of the fourth session, which helped us, for the first time, to get to the substantive issues, such as constitutional reform, the political transition and the holding United Nations-supervised elections.

In the interim, Senegal calls for a swift and reliable assessment of what took place in Idlib yesterday. We also call for the speedy and reliable identification of the perpetrators. As for the team of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission for Syria, whose members are ready to start work, and that of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, whose conclusions are pending to identify those responsible, Senegal reiterates its full support.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (spoke in Russian): We are grateful to the delegation of the United States for this opportunity for an open debate and to discuss honestly the very complex topic of the use of poisonous substances in the context of the Syrian conflict. Unfortunately, interest in such events clearly has an ideological thrust. Let us acknowledge that it is closely interwoven with the anti-Damascus campaign, which has not yet reached the place it deserves on the rubbish heap of history. Its tone as an element of realism appears, when the political process in Astana and Geneva starts to really take shape and gain speed. Just, strangely, all kinds of incidents start to occur. The last example is the tragedy in Khan Shaykun.

According to our information, the Syrian Government has requested the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to send a fact-finding mission to Syria to investigate the incident as well as an OPCW rapid-response and assistance mission. There is no need to repeat that the Russian Federation has always had a clear and unequivocal position on the use of chemical weapons by anyone in absolutely unacceptable and circumstances. Those guilty of committing such a crime must be held accountable.

Let us look at the origin of the problem. The watershed in the history of the use of toxic chemicals in Syria, and then of full-fledged chemical warfare agents, was the establishment of the so-called "red lines" initiated by the previous United States Administration in 2012. Crossing those red lines was supposed to have led to military intervention in the intra-Syrian conflict. That decision served as a starting point for future provocations by terrorist and extremist groups with the use of chemical weapons. They sought to discredit the official Damascus regime and to create a pretext for the use of military force against a sovereign State.

Back then, our Western partners preferred to remain silent, including regarding the request that came from Damascus in March 2013 about investigating the use of sarin by insurgents in a suburb of Aleppo, Khan al-Assal. We hope that this kind of attitude will not be repeated this time. It was such inaction that encouraged the insurgents, who felt they enjoyed impunity, to conduct their large-scale acts on 21 August 2013 in eastern Ghouta, when sarin was used again. By the way, quite coincidentally, this act was timed to coincide with the first mission to Syria of a United Nations group of experts, led by Åke Sellström. It tried to ascribe responsibility for the atrocities to Government troops, but they did not succeed in doing so because, at the time, Damascus showed sufficient good faith, and, through the efforts of the Russian Federation and the United States, with the support of the international community, it was possible to achieve a successful chemical disarmament of Syria.

When it became clear that the Government of Mr. Assad is very near the [illegible] very complex conditions of the armed conflict, unable to eliminate its chemical arsenals, we are experiencing the alleged use in Syria of chlorine as chemical weapons. The OPCW established a fact-finding mission for that chemical attack, with the support of the Government of Damascus, which was ready to duly investigate such incidents. But in fact this mission never visited the supposed sites where attacks is said to take place. And on a poor foundation raised in the work of the fact-finding Mission, and in of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) in Syria to investigate cases of use of chemical weapons in Syria, the latest known fabricated by the Syrian opposition and non-governmental organizations has report a direct alleged use of chlorine by Government forces. Its reports were taken at face value, and no one sought to conduct an objective investigation.

If anyone has any doubt that the images of the so-called use of sarin incidents, in particular in Sarmin, were staged in advance, one need only look at the videos that were filmed on that subject by certain pseudo-humanitarian non-governmental organizations, such as the White Helmets, which were praised by some in this Chamber, and by Jabhat Al-Nusra. In those videos, one sees the same "actor-correspondents". It is a fact that the White Helmets are closely linked to that terrorist organization, or perhaps those who fabricated those materials were the same persons who were exaggerating about the humanitarian catastrophe in eastern Aleppo while they were busy filling their warehouses with medication and food when the population was starving. I asked here at the United Nations, "Is that true"? They said, "Yes ,that is true. Why"? Apparently, they were getting ready for a long-term siege. Can you believe the degree of cynicism: those are the organizations that provide video materials for this, and these video materials should serve as a basis for us to draw conclusions?

The OPCW experts have confirmed that these kinds of terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and Al-Nusra, produce fully fledged weaponized chemical substances, mustard gas and sarin, which are regularly used in Syria and Iraq. By the way, the Western intelligence community also agrees with those kinds of conclusions. We have often argued our position in the Security Council regarding the preliminary outcome of investigations in the framework of the Joint Investigative Mechanism. Much still needs to be examined. That is why we agreed to extend the mandate of the Mechanism for another year. We need to conduct a thorough, depoliticized investigation of cases of the use of chemical weapons, based on reliable and verified facts. The future work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism needs to be expanded geographically. Its mandate needs to be buttressed by real anti-terrorist support, which is provided for by a Security Council resolution.

No one should seek to sow the seeds of discord between the Russian Federation and the government of Iraq and other countries of the region. We have a solid position in the Middle East. People believe us, and what we are doing is to support Baghdad and not act against it, as some affirm. There should be some bounds of propriety.

We are very concerned about the fact that certain States are already manipulating the preliminary results of the work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism. An example of this kind of i.responsible approach was the draft resolution on sanctions (S/2017/172) under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations that was put to the vote on 28 February, even while the political processes in Astana and Geneva were working very well. The aforementioned States created an absolutely artificial provocation in the Security Council without even explaining the purpose of putting the draft resolution to a vote. If the Russian and Chinese initiative had been taken seriously two years ago, including the draft resolution that we submitted, then the situation today would be radically different. But that initiative was disregarded.

To respond to the question posed by the United Kingdom as to whether Russia has a plan, the answer is yes. We have more than one plan. The first plan is to combat terrorism. The second plan relates to the draft resolution before us. At this stage, we do not see a particular need to adopt a draft resolution. Previously adopted decisions are more than sufficient to conduct a thorough investigation of the incident. But, if some of the Security Council members think that a new draft resolution is desirable or necessary, then it needs to have a completely different shape and form.

The preambular part should state that the Security Council deeply regrets the massacre of people as a result of the use chemical agents in Khan Shaykhun. It should also state that those reports dictate the need to carry out a comprehensive investigation in order to find out what happened and who is responsible. The preambular section should also condemn the use of chemical weapons by anyone. The operative part should be limited to one paragraph indicating that the OPCW Fact-finding Mission should conduct a thorough investigation of the reports on the ground, but with one important condition — the staff of the investigative Mission should be introduced to the Council and should reflect a geographical balance. There should also be a demand that illegal armed groups that control the area where the alleged chemical attack occurred, including and with access to that area and furnish all the necessary information. The main task now is to conduct an objective inquiry into what occurred.

The list of falsified reports regarding the incident have come from the previously mentioned White Helmets or the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, based in London. Those two sources have long been discredited. To take their reports at face value as a basis for making important decisions is neither professional nor prudent. At the same time, we note the contradictory character of the reports about the incident. The White Helmets are jumbling information in their reports; their versions keep changing. They refer to bombings, either from helicopters or aircraft; they mention the use of chlorine or sarin; and they constantly change the number of victims. In the videos and photos released on social media, we see the representatives of the White Helmets providing assistance to the victims while acting very unprofessionally and without any decent protective means. Also, the behaviour of the representatives of the White Helmets in extreme circumstances is very relaxed, which leads one to question the plausibility of those materials. Such actions are meant to provoke.

As a matter of fact, the aforementioned discrepancies arealso reflected in the draft resolution. The second preambular paragraph, for example, expresses the horror of what occurred — as though it were an established fact. The operative paragraph 3 states that we need to establish whether or not the event took place. Has anyone even checked what was written? In other words, this draft resolution is hasty and superficial. Let us be clear — putting forward such a text for adoption by the Security Council is simply inappropriate.

As for the incident that allegedly took place on territory that since 2014 has been under the control of terrorists from the Al-Nusra Front, it is true that on 4 April, from 11.30 to 12.30, local time, Syrian planes conducted an air strike in the eastern edge of Khan Shaykhun, on a large warehouse containing ammunition and military equipment. At that site, there was a facility for producing ammunition with toxic agents. That ammunition was for use in Iraq and Aleppo. Their use in that region was confirmed last year by Russian military experts. The symptoms of those affected in Khan Shaykhun, as shown in video footage on social networks, were the same as those who were affected last year in Aleppo, when all of the information regarding the use of those chemical substances, found in samples of soil from that city, was collected and forwarded to the OPCW, where they continue to be reviewed hesitantly.

What is clear to us is that chemical terrorism is increasing and needs to be countered as decisively as possible. Unfortunately, over the past three years, all of our attempts to get the Security Council to respond to

the crimes of terrorists who are using chemical weapons with increasing frequency have been unsuccessful due to the opposition of our Western colleagues. In typical fashion, they were completely indifferent to the recent actions of terrorists in Mosul, and that fact was confirmed by reputable and impartial international organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross.

I now draw the Council's attention to the Secretary-General's statement. He called for a thorough inquiry into what really happened in Khan Shaykhun. We fully support that position. The investigation must be comprehensive and objective. We must put an end to the very poor practice of investigation from afar, often based on information that is posted on the Internet or taken from neighbouring countries — used even by the Fact-finding Mission. That information is questionable and very difficult to prove. Any investigative body, including the Fact-finding Mission, must actually visit the site where the alleged use of chemical weapons occurred in Syria, while using a broad range of methodologies, such as taking samples and consulting with medical and legal forensic experts. The need for such a serious and professional approach was specifically mentioned in the fourth and fifth reports of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (see S/2016/888 and S/2017/131), in paragraphs 89 and 11, respectively.

I once again stress that the team of investigators must be truly international, in line with the principles of broad geographical representation as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. In its current form, the composition of the Fact-finding Mission in no way respects that foundational principle. The conclusions of the Fact-finding Mission cannot possibly be called impartial.

There is one other thing I would like to talk about, which is, once again, the utterly irresponsible, disrespectful, unprofessional statement by the British Ambassador. It can be explained by the fact that they are doing nothing — nothing — to normalize the situation in Syria. Actually, they are doing one thing — dumping provocative draft resolutions in the Security Council — and, by the way, openly putting unilateral pressure on the Joint Investigative Mechanism in an attempt to extract the conclusions that he needs. Just in general, Mr. Rycroft's pronouncements about China and Russia cross a diplomatic line that is simply unacceptable and must not be repeated. We are not going to sit here and listen to it any more. Better that they should tell us what Britain is doing to solve the situation in Syria. They keep asking questions of Russia and China. Do they feel any such responsibility with regard to the issue? No, they do not.

This is all about an obsession with regime change. That is what is preventing the Security Council from working constructively. It is they who are undermining the Council through their attempts to use Council decisions to give their illegitimate plans a veneer of legitimacy. But it is not working, and it will never work. It is time to change that broken record. Nor should they attempt yet again to set us against the peoples of Syria, Iraq and other nations of the Middle East. I thought that British diplomacy had long ago abandoned such crude tactics. They should think very hard about that.

I reiterate once again that we will never be able to resolve the Syrian conflict or any other global problems, including that of aggressive terrorism, without genuine united effort. We are ready to work together on that.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

It was interesting to hear my Russian colleague talk about the independent investigations and their importance, because the entire Security Council decided on what the Joint Investigative Mechanism would be and what it would do, and it was actually voted on unanimously. The Joint Investigative Mechanism reported that the Syrian Government had used chemical weapons against its own people three different times. But somehow now we do not like what the Joint Investigative Mechanism does.

Having said that, I will say that in the life of the United Nations there are times when we are compelled to do more than just talk, there are times when we are compelled to take collective action. The Security Council thinks of itself as a defender of peace, security and human rights. We will not deserve that description if we do not rise to the challenge and take action today.

Yesterday morning we awoke to pictures of children foaming at the mouth and suffering convulsions being carried in the arms of desperate parents. We are victims of lifeless bodies, some still in diapers, some with the visible signs of a chemical weapon attack. I call it those pictures. We cannot close our eyes to those pictures. We cannot close our minds to the responsibility to act.

We do not yet know everything about yesterday's attack. We have an open things to be done. We

know that yesterday's attack bears all the hallmarks of the Al-Assad regime's use of chemical weapons. We know that Al-Assad has used these weapons against the Syrian people before; that was confirmed by the Council's own independent team of investigators. We know that yesterday's attack was a new low, even for the barbaric Al-Assad regime.

Evidence reported from the scene indicates that Al-Assad is now using even more lethal chemical agents than he did before. The gas that fell out of the sky yesterday was even more deadly, leaving men, women, the elderly and children gasping for their very last breath. And as first responders, doctors and nurses rushed to help the victims, a second round of bombs rained down. They died in the same slow, horrendous manner as the civilians they were trying to save.

We all also know this. Just a few weeks ago, the Council attempted to hold Al-Assad accountable for suffocating his own people to death with toxic chemicals. Russia stood in the way of ensuring such accountability. It made an unconscionable choice and chose to close its eyes to the barbarity. It defiled the conscience of the world. Russia cannot escape responsibility for this. In fact, if Russia had been fulfilling its responsibility, there would not even be any chemical weapons left for the Syrian regime to use.

There is one more thing we know. We know that if nothing is done, these attacks will continue. Al-Assad has no incentive to stop using chemical weapons so long as Russia continues to protect his regime from consequences. I implore my colleagues to take a hard look at their words in the Council. We regularly repeat tired talking points in support of a peace process that is regularly undermined by the Al-Assad regime. Time and time again, Russia uses the same false narrative to deflect attention from its allies in Damascus. Time and time again, without any factual basis, Russia attempts to place blame on others.

[illegible] There is an obvious truth here that must be spoken. The truth is that Al-Assad, Russia and Iran have no interest in peace. The illegitimate Syrian Government, led by men with no conscience, has committed untold atrocities against its people for more than six years. Al-Assad has made it clear that he does not want to take part in a meaningful political process.

Iran has reinforced Al-Assad's military, and Russia has shielded Al-Assad from United Nations sanctions. [illegible] has its influence in Syria but it seems to have, we need to see it use it. We need to see it put an end to these horrific acts. How many more children have to die before Russia cares?

The United States sees yesterday's attack as a disgrace at the highest level, an assurance that humanity means nothing to the Syrian Government. The question that the members of the Council must ask themselves is this: if we are not able to enforce resolutions preventing the use of chemical weapons, what does that say about our chances of ending the broader conflict in Syria? What does that say about our ability to bring relief to the Syrian people? If we are not able to enforce resolutions preventing the use of chemical weapons, what does that say about our effectiveness in this institution?

If we are not prepared to act, then the Council will keep meeting, month after month, to express outrage at the continuing use of chemical weapons and it will not end. We will see more conflict in Syria, we will see more pictures that we can never unsee.

I began my remarks by saying that, in the life of the United Nations, there are times when we are compelled to take collective action. I will now add this: when the United Nations consistently fails in its duty to act collectively, there are times in the life of states in which we are compelled to take our own action. For the sake of the victims, I hope that the rest of the Council is finally willing to do the same. The world needs to acknowledge the use of chemical weapons and the fact that it will not be tolerated.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. [illegible] (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Several members of the Security Council today made statements that have unequivocally further demonstrated that my country, Syria, is a victim of two simultaneous acts of aggression. The [illegible] involves the attack by the permanent members of the Council, and the second concerns the attack by proxy being carried out by armed terrorist groups in Syria on the instructions of those permanent member States of the Council. Both seem to have an appetite for falsifying and fabricating evidence. We have been witness to on practices for more than 6 years in the Council. I charge with the [illegible] using, and to illegal agents of mass destruction [illegible] Ghouta, I categorically

reject the false accusations and allegations of the Syrian Arab Army's use of toxic chemical substances against Syrian civilians in Khan Shaykhun. The latter are used as human shields by armed terrorist groups. Syria also reaffirms that the Syrian Arab Army does not possess any type of chemical weapon. We have never used them, and we never will.

My Government subscribes to the principled and firm position that eschews the use of chemical weapons and all weapons of mass destruction whatever the parties concerned, wherever, whatever the circumstance and whatever the justification. Such use constitutes a crime against humanity — an unjustifiable crime that runs contrary to all ethics. Those are the firm principles by which we stand and based upon which we joined the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). We have honoured all our obligations under the Convention on Chemical Weapons because we believe that the Middle East should be a WMD-free zone. We have demonstrated our commitment and transparency within the framework of the agreement between my country, the OPCW and the United Nations Office for Project Services.

Baseless politicized accusations have been levelled against my country and its allies in our war against terror since day one, as the media have disseminated information provided by Council-designated terrorist groups, especially in Khan Shaykhun. That confirms that certain parties represented within the Council, as well as Turkey and other countries, will continue their politicized and dangerous practices aimed at blackmailing my Government and its allies, tarnishing our reputation in our efforts to combat terror, obstructing talks in Astana and Geneva and ending all prospects for a political settlement of the crisis, even if it is at the expense of children and women who are the innocent victims of the terrorism that today threatens Syria and the rest of the world. Certain Governments are now of one voice in unjustifiably and systematically accusing Syria so as to as to send us back to square one with regard to the issue of chemical weapons and serve clear political objectives. That is an attempt to hamper the attitude of openness towards Syria that had begun to take shape only recently.

On 21 March, the head of my country's delegation to the Geneva talks expressed to Mr. De Mistura Syria's concern about reports of armed terrorist groups' possession of toxic chemicals in the rural areas of Damascus, Idlib and Hama and their potential use as weapons against civilians. He warned of fabricated and falsified evidence and any other accusation levelled against my country as was done in the past.

I would like to remind the Council that my Government has sent more than 90 letters, of which the most recent dates from several days ago, to the Council, the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1540 (2004), the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and the OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism. All those letters includede information documenting armed terrorist groups' — namely, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh) — possession of toxic chemicals that had been acquired via Turkish territory. We condemn the latter and find it very strange that such actions coincide with the holding of international meetings on Syria, negotiations with Syrian representatives in Astana and Geneva, and incidents in which civilians have been targeted.

That is in line with the continued cheap political exploitation by certain Member States represented in the Council through using fabricated reports disseminated by the media that have ties to certain countries' intelligence bodies. They do not rely on reason or logic, or wait to establish the facts. They do not even give a minute's thought to who is the real beneficiary of using toxic chemicals against innocent civilians. The answer is clear: the main beneficiaries are the same regimes that have targeted Syria for more than six years. They are now attempting to come to the rescue of the armed groups and the alliance of armed groups, so that they can undermine the political process in Geneva and Astana. That narrative in the Council against my country is the only explanation that accounts for the statements made by the President of the Council for the month of March when he declared that he would oppose any draft resolution introduced by the Russian Federation or China with regard to the issue of armed groups' possession of chemical weapons in Syria and Iraq.

It is quite paradoxical that France called for this meeting. On instructions from former Minister for Foreign Affairs Laurent Fabius, that country fabricated the report of the use of toxic chemicals in eastern Ghouta in August 2013, which was documented in a book by two French journalists entitled *Le Chemin de l'homme*. France, along with its accomplices, is politically, legally and ethically responsible for the illegal international coalition's role in the shelling of civilians and the destruction of infrastructure. I would

like to remind the Council of the barbaric massacre carried out by French warplanes against 200 civilians in an Aleppo village in July 2016 and the recent airs trikes by the international alliance in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor that claimed the lives of scores of civilians and destroyed numerous bridges and infrastructure.

In conclusion, my Government categorically rejects falsified and fabricated accusations. It nevertheless reaffirms that it will continue to honour its obligations under the Convention on Chemical Weapons and in its ceaseless war against terror. We will relentlessly combat terror despite any cheap attempt to exploit the innocent blood spilled in Syria.

The meeting rose at noon.